

Statement to the
California Performance Review Commission
by
Ronald Johnston, Ph.D.
President
and
Bruce W. Robeck, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President
California Coalition for Construction in the Classroom
September 9, 2004

Workforce Education Promotes Choices for Students

We come before you today, two Ph.D.s from the University of California system, to strongly urge that public schools return to the tradition of providing integrated career technical education combined with strong and effective academic programs. It is the combination of these two education disciplines that is missing from most of our comprehensive high schools. The California Performance Review (CPR) proposals regarding career technical education and the purpose of public schools provide an **essential correction** to the current trend in instructional programs.

The CPR advocates a reinvigorated career technical education program for today's student. In fact, we believe that appropriate hands-on experience and applied academic education are a powerful combination that is attractive to many high school students.

Now what is wrong with California's high schools offering career technical education integrated with rigorous academic courses?

Nothing. In fact, more than 30 percent of the freshmen entering high school never finish their senior year and graduate. Would these students be invigorated by a career technical education that included an applied approach to traditional academic instruction? Would learning geometry be more meaningful to many students if the subject was used in the construction a home's roof structure? You bet it would.

Students who successfully complete a career technical education are more likely to graduate and then continue higher education for further training. In today's world, half of the projected jobs will not demand a bachelor's degree but will require continued higher education instruction. The California construction industry has a severe shortage of trained workers to help meet the demand for residential and commercial building. But there are only a limited number of school programs that produce students who are prepared for these careers. This must change.

Should California's high schools simply ignore the career goals and clear employment opportunities for nearly one-third of the students? I say no. All students should be given

a relevant high school education even if that program does not fit the “traditional, academic” model that some people would force on all students.

The CPR articulates the benefits to society of having a well-trained and educated workforce that fills critical jobs that do not need the traditional bachelor’s degree. It notes that high-risk students are eight to ten times **less** likely to drop out in the 11th or 12th grade if they enroll in a career technical program rather than a general program.

Having kids stay in school is a lot better than having them hang out at the mall. Who advocates that 16 or 17 year old kids would be better off dropping out of school and working at minimum wage with no career prospects? Students who develop a career will earn higher wages, pay more taxes, and become productive members of our community. I say that is a good idea.

The performance review identified education for all students as an important goal for California’s high schools. California employers are crying out for skilled workers, and the schools should be part of the solution. Nothing is taken away from the students who seek the traditional A-G university preparatory program. Let them continue to provide for those students. But high schools are in serious need of paying adequate attention to the students who choose a career technical education. We say that the CPR is right on target in their recommendations.

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